

OPENING STATEMENT BY REP. JOHN BOEHNER, CHAIRMAN
EDUCATION & THE WORKFORCE COMMITTEE
MARKUP OF WELFARE REFORM
BUDGET RECONCILIATION LEGISLATION
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Good morning. I'd like to thank everyone for being here, and I welcome my colleagues on the Committee.

Today, we begin fulfilling our responsibility to report legislation to the Budget Committee under the budget agreement reached by the House and Senate last spring. As part of the agreement, our Committee has been tasked with finding savings from the mandatory spending programs within our jurisdiction.

The budget agreement accommodates welfare reform as part of the reconciliation process. While the Ways & Means Committee has jurisdiction over the mandatory side of welfare reform, we have jurisdiction over the discretionary and work-related components. So, today we'll do our part by considering this important measure.

We've dealt with this issue many times over the past several years, but unfortunately our Senate colleagues have not acted on a reform measure of their own. So, we are at it once again today.

Earlier this year, I joined several of my colleagues – including Mr. McKeon – in introducing H.R. 240, the *Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act*. Today, we will consider a proposal which mirrors that bill and report it to the Budget Committee as part of the budget reconciliation process. Immediately following that, we will consider and send H.R. 240 itself to the House floor as well.

The effects of the 1996 welfare reform law have been nothing short of dramatic. Millions of Americans have moved from welfare to work, and caseloads are down by more than one-half.

But we still have more work to do. About 58 percent of Temporary Aid to Needy Families (or TANF) recipients still are not working for their benefits. Therefore, the measure we will consider today strengthens current work requirements by asking welfare recipients to engage in work-related activities for the traditional 40 hours a week, 16 of which could be in education and job training. In short, this legislation provides the necessary flexibility for recipients to combine work with other activities that promote self-sufficiency.

This bill makes improvements to child care for low-income families and enhances flexibility for states and localities to coordinate a variety of federal programs so resources are used as effectively as possible. It also increases the authorization for the Child Care and Development Block Grant by \$1 billion over five years, which is in addition to the already historically-high level of child care funding under current law.

There is a unique provision of this legislation that I find particularly meaningful. It would require welfare recipients who have school-age children to visit their children's school at least twice a year. Not only will this allow them to track their children's academic and social progress, but it will also give parents an opportunity to meet their children's teachers – and vice-versa. At

a time when we place such a high premium on parental involvement in education, this will help ensure low-income children are not left behind.

Lastly, let me remind my colleagues that our action on this legislation follows our quick action on emergency relief for families impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Shortly after the hurricane struck the Gulf Coast, Congress passed and President Bush signed into law the *TANF Emergency Response & Recovery Act* to give impacted states additional resources so they may provide emergency relief for many residents of the region, including a 20 percent increase in TANF funds for states impacted by Katrina.

Moreover, that measure waives federal work requirements and time limits for Gulf Coast residents in need of this short-term relief as a result of the hurricane. In addition, for one year, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana would not be penalized for failure to comply with certain aspects of welfare law, such as work participation requirements.

The legislation we will consider today continues this theme of flexibility for hurricane-impacted states. It would ease federal requirements for state administration of the child care block grant to give affected families easier access to child care services. Not only does this provision apply to all states declared a disaster area after the hurricanes, but it also applies to states that have accepted large numbers of families displaced from the Gulf Coast region.

Just as it has been in years past, building on our welfare reform success is a top priority for the House and this Committee. Our vote today will give this effort new momentum this year. And with that, I yield to my friend Mr. Miller.